

Date: April 29, 1974

Place: Lemoi's Hardware Store, Davis Street, Evanston, Illinois.

Interview with: Tom Kees

Observation: From the last interview it is apparent that Tom Kees preferred working to going to school. Purpose of this interview is to find out what the school offered him, and what he felt about Beardsley, the principal.

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Q. Good morning, Mr. Kees. Did you have a nice weekend?

A. Well, I worked here on Saturday. Things were just popping. They always are on a nice weekend. And then I did some work around the house on Sunday. Started taking down the storm windows.

Q. Ha! That's a coincidence. This past Friday I visited a Milton Harper at his home on Sherman. For a short time I helped him do the same thing.

A. Now's the time.

Q. I'd also like to thank you for recommending to me that I visit the Historical Society. I talked to Mr. Darling, who showed me a few newspaper clippings, but I also talked to a Mrs. Harper who works there. And then later, to her husband.

A. Well, I knew that they'd be able to help you down there. That Mr. Darling is a good man.

Q. Mr. Kees, one of the things which I had been told about the Evanston High School during that time when Mr. Beardsley was the principal, what I've been told is that in some ways the school provided only a college preparatory type of education. And that at the same time there were very few extracurricular activities, such as athletics, clubs, or things like that. In other words, the school stressed things like Latin, mathematics, foreign languages. Is that a fair comment on the school?

A. Well, I don't know if it was different from any other school. Of course it was the only one in Evanston. I know they taught other things besides Latin. I took the commercial course. That had shorthand and typing. Miss Rutheta Hunt was my typing teacher. She married Mr. Beardsley. There were other courses. French, Spanish, Latin, Yes, English.

Q. Did you have to take Latin?

A. (Chuckle) Oh, no, no. I couldn't be bothered with work like that. I worked all through school, and, well, just didn't...

Q. Before you said Spanish?

A. Did I say Spanish? I meant Latin. And before you mentioned something about sports. I'm sure there were sports. Baseball, Football. Ed Marrow coached baseball. Good team.

Q. Did you ever play on the team?

A. Not on the team, no. I did play at other times, though. Sometimes at the "Y". Evanston had teams that played other schools; sometimes we won, sometimes we lost. I didn't follow it then.

Q. Another thing that I heard was that there were no clubs. Is that, a, true?

A. Oh, I couldn't remember. There may have been a banjo club, because I know that there was one earlier.





- Q. Can you remember some of the other course which you took, in addition to shorthand and typing?
- A. A, English, though I never really did like the English teacher. It was a commercial, or, a, business English. Letter writing. And I took Algebra. I don't really recall much more.
- Q. In general, did you like your experience at school?
- A. Well, I did the work. I didn't like or dislike it more than the others. I had some good teachers and some bad ones, just like everybody, I guess. I had a Mr. Maurer for science -- that was another course we had -- Mr. Maurer for science. He was a good man and a good teacher. He had worked as a coal miner in Pennsylvania before becoming a teacher. You didn't fool around with him. He used to take charge of the R.O.T.C. drill we had on Elmwood. And then digging the trenches out by Prairie Avenue.
- Q. Yes, you mentioned that last time and I meant to ask about that.
- A. Oh, it was some sort of drill. I don't actually think that we were expecting an attack on Chicago, or anything like that.
- Q. We never did get around to talking about Mr. Beardsley the last time. What can you tell me about him?
- A. Mr. Beardsley. Was a good man; really one of the nicest men. He and Mr. Nichols. He was principal of the three other schools. Dewey, Lincoln, and Washington. And then later the Oakton School, too.
- Q. What sort of disposition did he have? Was he stern? Strict? Mild? Friendly? Snobby?
- A. I didn't have that much to do with them, but I know that both, that Mr. Beardsley was always a pleasant, friendly man. He dressed well. Some people may have thought him uppity for that, but that's just not the way he was. Couldn't have been a nicer man.
- Q. Do you ever remember any interesting stories about him?
- A. No, but the only time I much saw him was when he gave out the report cards in the assembly. We all used to sit down then walk up one row at a time. He always knew everybody's name, it seemed. And I think the people of Evanston liked him also.
- Q. Did your father ever talk about him? Or about the school?
- A. No, not really.
- Q. Mr. Kees, that brings up something else that's aroused my curiosity. During much of this time, the school or make-shift schools were overcrowded or simply inadequate for the job to be done. Yet the people never seemed to pass the necessary bond issues to raise money. This was true into the 1920's too, for it wasn't until 1924, I believe, that the new school was built. Do you know, or did you ever hear people talk about this sort of thing?
- A. No, I never knew anything about that.
- Q. In Mr. Harper's Class picture I only saw one black student. Were there many blacks in school?





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A. Yes, there were some black students. But I had no more or less to do with them than I did with anybody else there, what with working and all. There was never any trouble at the school. Certainly not like today. I mean not here, but what you read or see.

Q. Any blacks in your commercial courses?

A. Yes, there were two girls, but I never knew what happened to them. I sometimes worked with blacks doing yard work. And of course I worked with blacks on the railroad. But I don't recall there ever being any trouble at the school.

Q. You mentioned that because of the war, you started working full time in 1914. I believe that you said that your parents wouldn't approve your papers to join-up, so you began working with the railroad. Now, did any other students do that?

A. Oh, there were a few, there were a few. Tim Kelly, a couple of years older actually joined up. He came back and then moved west. There were some boys that did, sometimes because of the war, sometimes for some family reason, like having to work.  
(Again customer interruptions interfered with the interview)

Q. It looks like business is picking up.

A. Yes, I think I'll have to go.

Q. Again, thank you very much, Mr. Kees. Now will Mr. Lemoi be in later?

A. He should be.



